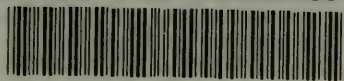


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Harvard College

Class..

Oration



By

Rescoe Conkling Bruce

Delivered for the Class of 1883 in Sanders
Chamber, June 16, 1881

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Harvard College
Class....
Oration

By
Roscoe Conkling Bruce
Delivered for the Class of 1902 in
Sanders Theatre, June 20, 1902



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Roscoe Conteling Bruce

Class Oration

ROSCOE CONKLING BRUCE

MR. MARSHAL, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—FELLOW CLASSMATES—To-day we stand upon the threshold of a new world. Upon the world we leave we look with gratitude; it has taught us “to dream no dreams, to tell no lies, but to go our way, wherever it may lead, with our eyes open and our heads erect.” Upon the new world we look with some misgiving and yet, we know, its imperfections are its glory. The new world differs from the old, but in the new world as in the old we shall be Harvard men; our lives shall possess integrity. We go to make our special parts of the new world contain the ideal of the old.

The university ideal is carved upon our gates—“After God had carried us safe to New England, and Wee had builded our

houses, provided necessaries for our livelihood, reared convenient places for God's worship, and settled the Civill Government: One of the next things Wee longed for, and looked after was to advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity: dreading to leave an illiterate Ministry to the churches, when our present Ministers shall lie in the Dust." Those words define the Veritas that in 1643 was inscribed upon the college seal and adopted as the college motto. The perpetuity of truth, the enlargement of truth, the diffusion of truth among the people,—for these purposes has there so long existed at Cambridge a Society of Scholars.

Guiding intelligence is the special gift of the university to the nation's life. University men form a large and important part of the intelligence that in industry, politics, art, religion, shapes social opinion and directs social action. And, in these responsibilities we, my classmates, are to share. Men of exceptional opportunity, we are bound by

august traditions to render exceptional service to the things in American life that tend toward perpetuity, enlargement, diffusion of truth. It is fitting, therefore, that I speak to you of the most manageable social appliance for these purposes,—I mean popular education.

This deserves your interest because it ministers to perpetuity of truth. The organized teaching of school and college, completing and reenforcing the unorganized teaching of environment, mainly accounts on the spiritual side for the web and tissue of civilized living. The great university with richly stocked libraries, and the little red schoolhouse with blue-back spelling books endow the present with the experience of the past. The elementary school perpetuates elementary knowledge of language and history and art and science. Now, our impressive civilization rests upon economic efficiency. The school for all the children of all the people should transmit a knowledge of all our fundamental interests

from sawing wood to reading Scripture! Advanced knowledge is rendered permanent by secondary schools and higher institutions. By giving the exceptional man an exceptional education, they give the nation guiding intelligence. If our popular leaders are men of fragmentary education, they will land the people in many a ditch. The trained leader is able to induce the present to recruit its scouts from the past. Taught the lessons of the past, fitted to grapple with principles and to make plain the emptiness of sham, our leaders should be rendered responsive to sound ideals. From these secondary and higher institutions come the teachers of our schools and colleges. The need of teachers who have been taught, is keenly felt throughout our educational endeavor, from backwoods school to university. Higher institutions give us professional men. "The real inventions and motive powers which impel society forward and upward," says President Eliot, "spring from those bodies of well-trained,

alert and progressive men known as the professions. They give effect to the discoveries and imaginings of genius. All the large businesses and new enterprises depend for their success on the advise and cooperation of the professions."

And so, my classmates, by contributing to the excellence of popular education, we may contribute importantly to perpetuity of truth. Institutions whose high office is to give the already gifted advanced knowledge, professional insight guiding intelligence, we, as college men, shall not willingly let die. We shall be able to offer the common school at least intelligent criticism and, if need be, intelligent defence. In 1899-1900, \$213,000,000 were spent for our common school system, the value of public school property was \$539,000,000, our school population was 22,000,000. That this large school expenditure be wisely directed, that this great public property be well administered, that this army of young people be led to useful victories—

these things are vital to the maintenance of the American type and quality of civilization.

Popular education contributes not only to perpetuity but also to enlargement of truth. Harvard University is the resort of specialists "each prepared," as the President says, "to push forward a little the present limits of knowledge; each expecting to clear up some tangle or bog on the frontier, or to pierce with his own little search-light, if only by a hand's breadth, the mysterious gloom which surrounds on every side the area of ascertained truth." The enlargements of truth which issue from accumulated researches of obscure, laborious specialists largely determine material and intellectual progress. Who can estimate how much the prolonged series of investigations which made possible a Pasteur has enchanted human well-being? The university develops the specialist, sustains his researches, and thus promotes enlargement of truth, and extends the area of enlightened social action. Inventive genius, which has

so incalculably enriched the man with the hoe and the man at the spindle, is, of course, no monopoly of university men. But the secret excellencies of ingenuity, as Milton would say, may be fetched out most surely by appropriate education of all the children of all the people. "There is no extravagance," says a distinguished living economist, "there is no extravagance more prejudicial to the growth of national wealth, than that wasteful negligence which allows genius which happens to be born of lowly parentage to expend itself in lowly work."

In short, for our civilization to attain the utmost progress, brains must not be wasted. For the sake of enlargement of truth, we, as Harvard men, shall support any practicable measure for extending to the competent the means of development. Capacity for research or for invention is no less capacity because found in a New York tenement house, in the mountains of Kentucky, or in the cabin of a Mississippi cotton plantation.

Popular education, I have said, rescues from darkness exceptional men,—a fact important to perpetuity, enlargement and diffusion of truth. Diffusion of truth among all the people is, moreover, a fundamental duty of democracy. To China the fact that the masses of the people obscurely vegetate is a circumstance of bland indifference; that, we hear, is what Chinese masses are for! In our American commonwealth where is the place for vegetating masses? Is it Massachusetts, or is it Georgia?

But, in America as everywhere else, theory and practice are not one. The nation does not sufficiently provide technical training. Of the 16,000,000 American citizens between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four less than one third of one percent are receiving instruction in the arts and sciences which bear directly upon their occupations. By extensions of the industrial education, we may reasonably expect to aid importantly the work of reclaiming the submerged tenth in our great cities,

lessening the drain from our farms by transforming drudgery into intelligent labor, inspiring the mountain whites of the South, adjusting the Negro to a mercilessly competitive civilization, increasing the efficiency and happiness of American working men and working women, giving rich and poor a wholesome respect for work and workers, furnishing the Republic citizens of resource.

Now, the facilities of secondary and higher education are tending to become tolerably adequate for the white population; but the proportion of colored persons enjoying such facilities, seriously less to-day than it was twenty years ago, is pathetically small. The white South and the black South are in interest fundamentally one; the North and South are one. To uplift the prostrate black South is to uplift the whole South, and to uplift the South is to uplift the nation. To equip the black South with guiding intelligence is, therefore, a national obligation.

Although the common school system has

been strengthened each year, even the North Atlantic and the Western States now spend for the education of each person of school age for a whole year only fourteen dollars: but the child, black or white, poor or rich, in these states receives much more than three times what the white child in the South receives, and much more than six times what the colored child in the South receives! In the faith that a chance to learn is the divine right of brains; that it is wiser to fill the schoolhouse than the jail; that there is no bulwark of defense, against foes without or foes within, half so strong as a thinking and resourceful people; that democratic institutions are strong when the average citizen is strong, weak when he is weak,—in this faith our forefathers entrenched the common school upon the principle that all the property of the state shall educate all the children of all the people.

I should be unfaithful to the facts, to my traditions, and to this occasion did I not say

one word more of the weakest point in American education, the provision for Americans of African descent. This building is a memorial to the Harvard men who served in the Civil War fighting for freedom and truth. Our Society of Scholars reveres the memory of its heroes and cherishes their achievements. The men whose names are written upon the tablets of this hall fought to save the Union and to free the slave. The Union is happily secure; in the war against Spain, white men of the North and white men of the South and sons of freedmen North and South, marched to victory side by side under the same flag with a common devotion. The Union is happily secure; but despite eager ambitions and demonstrated capacities, the sons of the freedmen, through no fault of their own, are, in the higher sense, not yet free. There upon the Southern plantation is an American black, bound hand and foot by ignorance and unthrift; slave to the untutored impulse of the present, he is also slave to the

accumulated impulses of his past; being slave to an unilluminated self, he is slave to a merciless master. For slavery of this type the Emancipation Proclamation is written in one word upon the university seal; it was spoken centuries ago by the Teacher of teachers, "And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

SEP. 13 1902





